

## What is "a Diet"?

Stir-frying was the chief cooking method during the Southern and Northern Dynasties (A.D. 420 - 589), and stir-fried dishes became popular as everyday meals among the common people. Buddhism was spreading in China by this time, and vegetarian dishes began appearing because the Buddhist monks ate vegetarian food. In response to the demand for vegetarian dishes, the cooks of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502 -557) introduced the use of gluten. After the Han Dynasty, thick soup became a less important non-staple food, and roasted, broiled, and baked meats were eaten only when people drank wine; they were not eaten with cooked rice.

Chinese dietetic culture flourished after the Han Dynasties (206 B.C. - A.D. 220) and became a conscious matter. Numerous writings on dietetic culture appeared, including the *Book of Foods*, by Cui Hao and some parts of the *Essentials for Common People (on food)*, by Jia Sixie in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 - 535). These writings, which record the popular thoughts on diets during this period and tell how to cook many dishes, mark the beginning of cooking as a specialty. The Han Dynasty imperial kitchens grew vegetables in hothouses, so their availability was not limited by the season. The technique of using fermentation to make staple foods, such as steamed buns, stuffed buns, and steamed cakes, which are still popular foods today, was already being used in the final years of the Han Dynasty. Several hundred writings about using food and diet-therapy for better health have appeared throughout Chinese history. Scholars, literati, medical specialists, calligraphers, painters, or historians wrote most of these books. This implies those diets, cooking, and diet-therapy to maintain good health constituted an important part of ancient Chinese culture. A few examples, listed by dynasty, follow:

• *The Book of Food*, by Cui Hao and the *Transactions of Famous Physicians*, by Tao Hongjing during the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

• *The Book of Food*, by Xie Feng and the *Collection of Writings and Copyings in the North Hall*, (the section on wine and foods), by Yu Shinan, an outstanding calligrapher (558 - 638) in the Sui Dynasty.

• *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies*, (the article on dietetic treatment), by Sun Simiao; the *General Descriptions of Diets*, by Lou Juzhong; and the *Experiences of Chefs*, by Yang Ye in the Tang Dynasty.

• *Records of Chefs*, by Zheng Wangzhi; the *Remarks on Delicious Dishes*, author unknown; the *Record of Influences of Things*, the *Simple Remarks on the Hows and Whys*, (the part on animals, fowl and fish), by Su Shi; and the *Five Looks of Officials at Meal Time* by Huang Tingjian in the Song Dynasty.

• *Collection of Dietetic Systems in the Yunlintang*, by Ni Zan (a famous painter, 1301 -1374) and the *Principles of Correct Diet*, by Hu Sihui in the Yuan Dynasty.

• *Health Building of the People in the Song Dynasty*, by Song Xu; the *Gentlemen's Remark on Diets*, by Chen Jirong (an outstanding painter); and the *History of the Ming Palace- Preferences for Diets*, by Liu Ruoyu in the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644).

• *Grand Secrets of Diets*, by Zhu Yizun; the *Chance Leisure for Enjoyments*, (the part on diets), by Li Yu; and the *Menus of the Sui Garden*, by Yuan Mei in the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911). Home